

TESTING AN UNDERWATER VIDEO SYSTEM AT LAKE CHAMPLAIN

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INTRODUCTION

In August, 1984, Wind & Whalebone Media Productions field-tested at Lake Champlain an integrated method of obtaining video images of, and other data related to, large, unidentified aquatic animals reported in the lake and said to be "Loch Ness-like animals" (see Joseph W. Zarzynski, 1982, LCPI Work at Lake Champlain: 1982, *Cryptozoology*, Vol. 1: 73-77; and 1983, LCPI Work at Lake Champlain: 1983, *Cryptozoology*, Vol. 2: 126-131).

It is the author's opinion that the most successful work in this field has involved studious review of available eyewitness sighting data, with a goal to predicting the animals' behavior patterns, and/or deployment of underwater probes, especially camera equipment (see Robert H. Rines, 1982, Summarizing a Decade of Underwater Studies at Loch Ness, *Cryptozoology*, Vol. 1: 24-32). The least successful efforts seem to have been hampered by an approach to the lakes as two-dimensional surfaces of water from which unidentified animals may make random appearances, such as is done with surface surveillance from camera set-ups on shore.

Few investigators, if any, seem to have specifically approached the problem in terms of the three-dimensional nature of the animals' habitat; that is, thinking of the lakes as "drowned valleys" with certain bottom contour features that may be favored by the animals for feeding, resting, and other behavior. A number of sonar contacts at or near lake bottom obtained by various expeditions at Loch Ness, and consistent eyewitness accounts of these animals sinking straight down (as opposed to diving forward), circumstantially indicate that they may spend a significant amount of time lying on the bottom. The identification, location, and investigation of such features in the lake basin or "valley," and the introduction of camera, sonar, or other probes into them might increase the probability of contacts with such animals.

Use of a moving lure of fish, their probable food source, in conjunction with the probe might further enhance this strategy. Dick Pool, of Spokane, Washington, for example, has successfully obtained footage of bait-striking behavior in Pacific salmon using various lures trawled behind an underwater video camera. (See Dwight Schuh, 1982, Salmon on TV, *Outdoor Life* [April], pp. 56-67, 118.) I was unaware of Pool's work while first developing my ideas, and thank Joe Zarzynski for bringing this article to my attention.

The intent of the 1984 work at Lake Champlain was: (1) to test an underwater video system deployed from a small boat, using the camera in both vertical, bottom inspection mode, and a horizontal, trawling mode; (2) to test the use of a lure of fish in conjunction with the trawling mode; and (3) to concentrate on submerged portions of the lake basin in the vicinity of confirmed surface sightings whose features (based on available bathymetric data) might be congenial to such animals (such features could be ledges or depressions for bottom resting behavior, or ridges along which fish might gather).

Wind & Whalebone Media fieldwork at Champlain in 1984 consisted of 14 days on site, with 4 days of actual field tests. Exercises were coordinated by the author. Assistance was given by Wendy Lathrop, Dennis and Janet Hall, Fred Keller, A. Burger, Joe Zarzynski, Paul Crane, and Deanna Parsons. In addition, Joan Crane, John Durant, Ed Parsons, Chris Stokes and Jane Garland provided logistical support.

The interest and suggestions of experienced researchers in this field were much appreciated. Joe Zarzynski, director of the Lake Champlain Phenomena Investigation (LCPI) was most helpful and supportive during the planning period, and he assisted during the first day of field trials. Ike Blonder, a board member of the Academy of Applied Science (AAS), visited our operations with his wife Lois. Mr. Blonder kindly provided a hydrophone for our use. Howard and Ruth Curtis, also of AAS, stopped in the area as well.

Grateful acknowledgment is also made of the support of Robert Durant, Margaret Light, and Mae W. Smith of this season's work.

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

Primary testing was conducted on a Hydro Products TC-125 underwater black-and-white video camera with supplemental LT-7 underwater light. The camera was deployed from a 22-foot double outboard motor boat. Video images were received in the boat on a black-and-white monitor and simultaneously recorded on a half-inch VHS portable video recorder (Fig. 1). The camera was housed inside a trawling wing designed by David Olsen.

Although surface watching was not emphasized during our activities, still cameras and binoculars were carried by the author and some other group members when on or near the lake in the event of a sighting. A 35mm camera with 300mm lens was the author's camera of choice during peak daylight hours. Other 35mm and Instamatic-type cameras with wide-angle lenses were used for general documentation of expedition activities.

Operations were carried out near a base camp at Essex, New York. This area was chosen for ease of operations, basin features of interest, past history of sightings, and water clarity.

August 1 through 8 were spent in camp set-up and final arrangements,

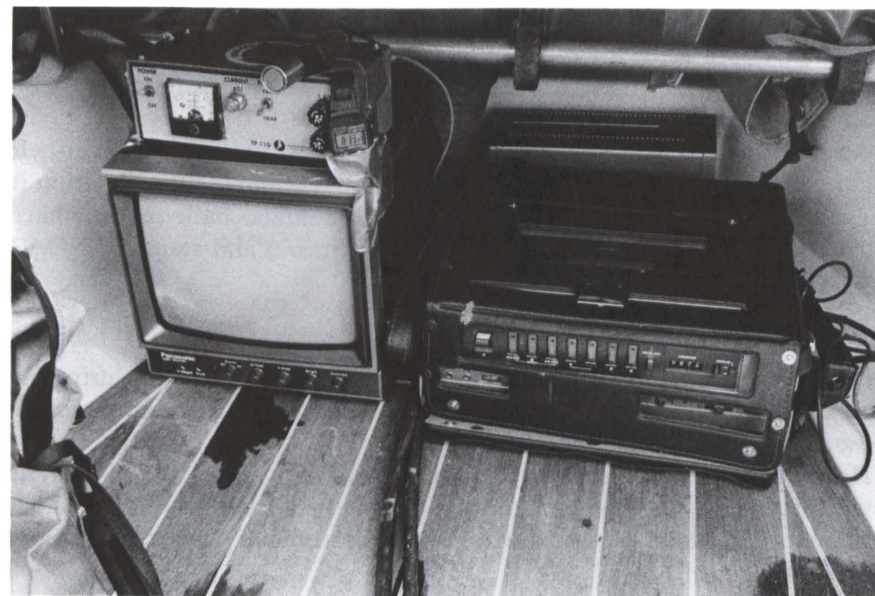


FIG. 1.—Video recorder and monitor in bow of boat during operations. Eel used as target lure was visible during this time in lower left of monitor, although photography of the screen in daylight renders it indistinct.

including site selections. August 9 was devoted first to simple deployment of the underwater video camera from the boat. The camera was trawled at the surface at a depth of approximately 12 feet, without supplemental light in the horizontal mode, trailing a simple aluminum can 4 feet behind the camera as a target. Next, the camera was deployed in a vertical scan mode, with light at 70 feet. The lake bottom was observed and recorded. These activities were carried out in Whallon Bay. August 10 involved deployment of camera with light and lure of two dead eels trawled behind the moving camera (eels were chosen for tests for their availability, their inexpensiveness, and also to avoid any conflicts that might arise with the use of game fish in this manner). The camera/lure was deployed off Split Rock Point in about 300 feet of water. The camera/lure was played out 250 feet from the boat and trawled at a depth of 140 feet. A similar test was carried out in the same location with a single eel target at 150 feet on August 11. August 12 saw a test of camera deployment along a submerged ridge off Bluff's Point, starting at 60 feet and moving down to 175 feet. Eel lure and supplemental light were used throughout this trial.

Field trials were carried out in the afternoon, except for August 12, which was an early-morning (5–9 a.m.) effort. All night work planned for August 11 was canceled due to threatening weather.

regard to these efforts. Public education will be carried out via selected press contacts, but with a strict eye towards maintaining the integrity of the research, and cordial, low-key community relations.